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ABSTRACT

Britain's General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) represent a new qualification that offers students a broadly based preparation for employment as well as an accepted route to further and higher education. They are of equal standing with academic qualifications at the same level and are designed to fit between and to complement the academic track and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). GNVQ content for each vocational sector is developed by an awarding body nominated by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ). The NCVQ accredits the GNVQ when development work is complete; the GNVQ can then be awarded by any of the three accredited awarding bodies. GNVQs, like NVQs, are made up of units that contain a number of elements, performance criteria, and other assessment information. Three types of unit make up the qualification and must be achieved for a student to obtain a GNVQ: mandatory vocational, optional vocational, and core skill units. Although designed specifically for students aged 16-19, GNVQs are available to all individuals over age 16. The GNVQ assessment system is designed so that most assessment is carried out during the course of the student's learning program. Evidence of achievement is collected by a variety of methods and gathered into a portfolio. Grading of GNVQs is based upon centrally determined grading themes, concerned with the generic process skills of planning, information seeking and handling, and evaluation. (YLB)

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Introducing General National Vocational Qualifications

Further Education Unit

CE 065 476

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INTRODUCING GENERAL NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

FOREWORD

In the White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century* the Government announced the development of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) — qualifications designed to provide a broad-based vocational education and offer students an alternative to GCSEs, GCE A levels and the occupationally specific National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs).

As GNVQs are introduced into colleges and schools over the next few years, they will, together with some NVQs, replace many of the broad vocational qualifications currently offered.

Although they share some of the characteristics of other qualifications, especially NVQs and existing broad vocational qualifications such as the Business and Technical Education Council (BTEC) Diplomas and the City and Guilds (C&G) Diploma in Vocational Education, there are important differences between GNVQs, NVQs and the qualifications they will eventually replace.

This bulletin describes the context and remit for the development of GNVQs and shows how they fit alongside and complement both NVQs and GCSEs and GCE A levels. It describes the structure of GNVQs and how they are assessed and graded.

This bulletin should be useful for those working in schools and colleges, higher education (HE) and industry and those involved in offering advice and guidance on education and training opportunities.

Introducing GNVQs is the first of a planned series of FEU GNVQ publications. It will be followed by bulletins on planning and co-ordinating the implementation of GNVQs, planning and organising development programmes for staff involved in GNVQs and bulletins on access and progression and GNVQ programmes.

Aidan Pettitt
Development Officer

INTRODUCTION

In phase one of the introduction of GNVQs (September 1992 to July 1993) over 50 FE and sixth-form colleges, together with a similar number of school sixth forms, offered GNVQs to nearly 9,000 students. By the end of 1993 over 50,000 students are expected to be involved in GNVQs. By September 1995, GNVQs will be available in 14 vocational sectors at three levels:

- Foundation GNVQs corresponding to NVQ level 1
- Intermediate GNVQs corresponding to NVQ level 2
- Advanced GNVQs corresponding to NVQ level 3

The timetable for the introduction of the new qualifications appears on page 2 (figure 1).

By 1996 the Department for Education (DFE) hopes to see GNVQs in at least two vocational titles available in at least 1500 schools and colleges, and one in four 16-year-old students starting programmes leading to GNVQs.

The phased development and introduction of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) into the post-16 curriculum will be a key task for sixth-form and further education (FE) colleges over the next few years. Many traditional vocational qualifications will be displaced and students and staff will find themselves involved in new assessment and grading systems. There will be fresh challenges and opportunities to develop new access and progression pathways, offer more flexible approaches to learning and increase achievement rates.

CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

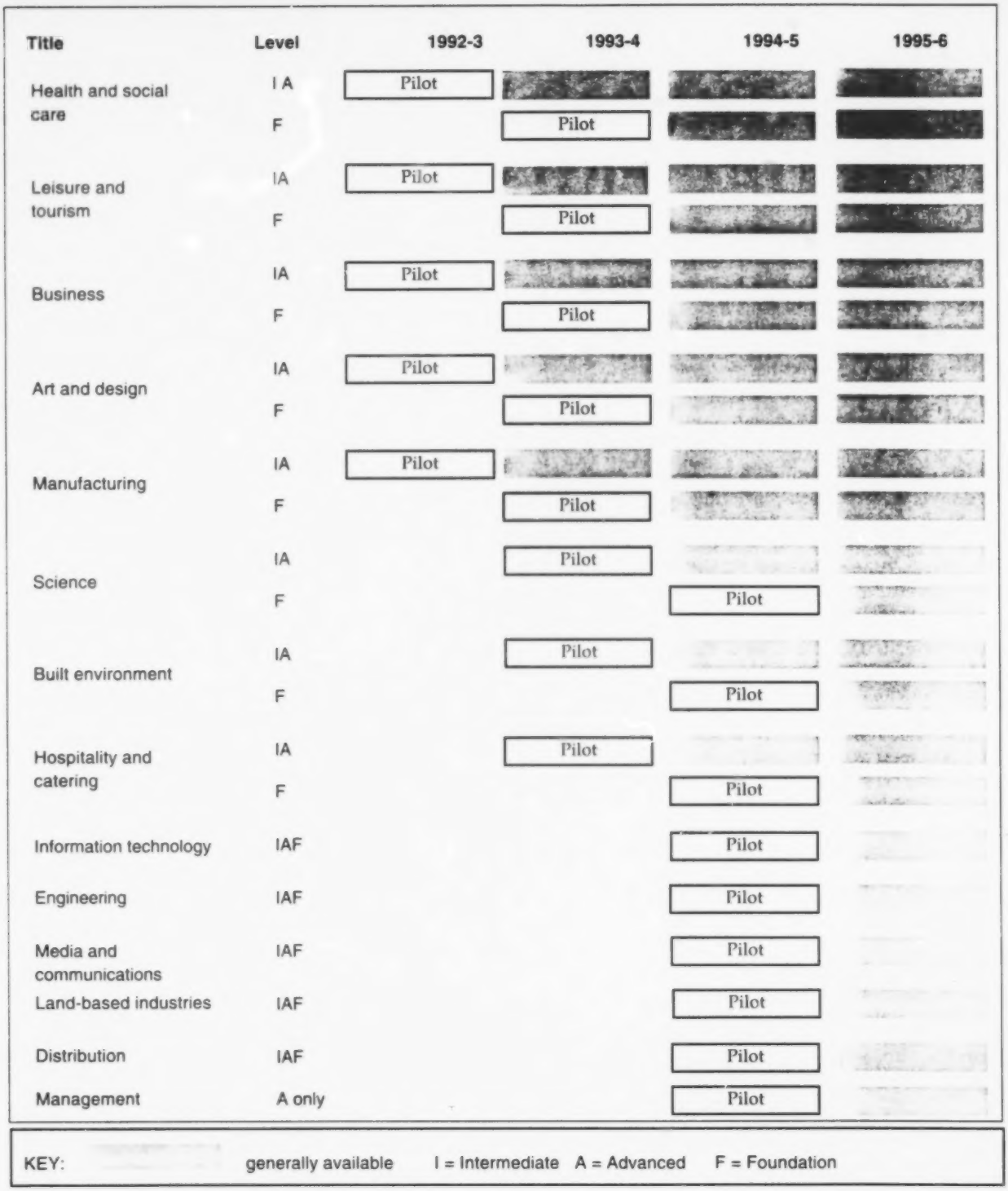
A new vocational qualification

Vocational qualifications have been the subject of reform since 1986 when the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was established by government to *'hallmark qualifications which meet the needs of employment'* and to *'locate them within a new structure which everyone could use and understand — the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Framework'*[1].

The NVQ Framework consists of five progressive levels, numbered from 1 to 5, and provides a national system for ordering vocational qualifications and indicating the relationship and progression routes between them. Qualifications are placed within the NVQ Framework at one of these five levels.

NVQs have now been available in some occupational sectors for over five years, replacing some vocational qualifications which were previously available. They are based on standards of competence determined by representatives from employment meeting as lead bodies or Occupational Standards Councils for each industry or group of closely related industries.

However, it has become apparent that NVQs are not suitable as a replacement for all existing vocational qualifications. NVQs are designed to accredit occupational competence. They are therefore particularly relevant to individuals who have already made firm decisions about their chosen occupation but far less appropriate for individuals who are still undecided about their future occupation. And because NVQs are focused on occupations and designed primarily for those in, or about to enter, employment they are not particularly suitable for progression into further or higher education.



(Figure 1).

Being designed to accredit occupational competence, NVQs demand that most assessment takes place under work-place conditions. This means that they present difficulties for full-time school and college students who may spend little, if any, time in a workplace.

In recent years many bodies have urged the development of generic, transferable, or core, skills but NVQs, like A levels, do not explicitly demand that core skills are developed, assessed or recorded.

The limitations of NVQs were felt most keenly amongst those responsible for the technical and vocational education of the 16-19 age group, both in schools and colleges (often through the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative — TVEI).

A consensus for a new qualification began to emerge which would develop and accredit students' achievement in a range of general skills, knowledge and understanding within a broad vocational sector. It would offer a broadly

based preparation for employment as well as an accepted route to further and higher education. It would be particularly suitable for use by students with limited opportunities to demonstrate competence in the workplace and place a premium on the development of core skills. In short the qualification would be designed particularly for those aged between 16 and 19, not in employment and likely to attend colleges as full-time students. Despite this target group no barriers would exist to older students achieving the new qualifications. It was against this background that in May 1991 the creation of GNVQs was announced in the White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century*.

The remit for GNVQs

Education and Training for the 21st Century suggested:

> *'Many young people want to keep their career options open. They want to study for vocational qualifications which prepare them for a range of related occupations but do not limit their choices too early. Some want to keep open the possibility of moving onto higher education. Employers, too, want to have the opportunity of developing their young recruits' general skills, as well as their specific working skills. A range of general qualifications is needed within the NVQ framework to meet these needs.'*

The government made it clear that General National Vocational Qualifications would be introduced as an alternative to both A levels and NVQs. They would differ from NVQs in a number of important respects (see fig. 2).

Government emphasised that General National Vocational Qualifications were intended to be of equal standing with academic qualifications at the same level and would be designed to fit between and to complement the 'academic' track and NVQs.

In July 1993 the Secretary of State for Education announced that GNVQs would be classified as Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced (corresponding to NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3). This announcement was made, he said, to give 'vocational qualifications much sought after parity of esteem with A levels' and to put in place 'three qualification pathways'.

The Secretary of State noted that although the three qualification pathways adopt different approaches and encourage different styles of learning (see fig..3), they are all aimed at the same destination: high levels of attainment that will provide a firm foundation for further study or employment.

Participation and achievement targets

GNVQs are intended to play a significant role in increasing rates of post-16 educational participation and achievement. The Secretary of State for Education pointed to one of the problems underlying the UK's relatively low participation and achievement rates when he told the Institute of Directors in April 1993:

Differences between GNVQs and NVQs

GNVQs	NVQs
vocationally specific and concerned with broad-based vocational education	*occupationally specific and concerned with occupational competence*
based on statements of achievement developed by NCVQ and awarding bodies and covering skills, knowledge and understanding within a broad vocational area	*based on standards developed by industry lead bodies covering functions performed in a specified occupation*
qualifications which include core skills	*qualifications which do not include core skills*
all qualifications at the same level composed of the same number of units at the level and of the same size	*qualifications composed of units which may be of different sizes and are not allocated to a level*
qualifications which do not require work-based assessment but require externally set tests	*qualifications which require work - based assessment but do not require externally set tests*
qualifications which are graded	*qualifications which are not graded*
number of titles restricted	*no restrictions on the number of titles*

(*Figure 2*)

> *'... too many of our young people take A levels with limited chance of success and too many leave the system because they are not attracted to the academic approach.'*

In July 1993 the Minister returned to this theme and announced:

> *'GNVQs will have a particularly important part to play alongside A and AS levels and NVQs, in helping to raise levels of achievement. They will help us continue to make rapid progress towards the challenging National Education and Training Targets.'*

The National Targets for Education and Training (previously the National Education and Training Targets — NETTs) were established by the Confederation for British Industry (CBI) and endorsed by the Government in 1991. They set clear foundation learning targets for increasing achievement and include specific references to GNVQs (see Fig.4).

Pre-16				National Curriculum
Post-16	**Occupational qualifications**	**Vocational qualifications**	**Academic qualifications**	
	National Vocational Qualifications	General National Vocational Qualifications	GCE A levels and AS exams	
Approved by	National Council for Vocational Qualifications	National Council for Vocational Qualifications	Schools Curriculum & Assessment Authority (SCAA)	
Based on	statements of occupational competence	statements of vocational achievement	statements of educational attainment	
Especially suitable for	progression to employment	progression to employment or further and higher education	progression to higher education	

The Three Post-16 Pathways

(Figure 3)

The drive to increase achievement rates is coupled with a desire to increase participation rates. Although 67% of the 16-year-old cohort stays on in full-time education and training (rising to 77% when both full- and part-time students are considered), this falls to 50% at age 17 and Britain's participation rate in post-compulsory education and training is low compared to other European countries. One consequence of this is that the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has been asked to attach particular importance to increasing full-time participation amongst those aged 17. Colleges have been asked to recruit eight per cent more students per year, over the next three years, amounting almost to a 26% increase.

National Targets for Education and Training: Foundation learning

- By 1997 80% of all young people to achieve qualifications at level 2 NVQ, GNVQ or its academic equivalent

  (Currently about 55% of the 18-year-old cohort reach this level.)

- By the year 2000 the targets demand that half of the age group achieve level 3 qualifications — the equivalent of 2 A levels.

  (At the moment only 33% of 18-year-old students reach this level of achievement.)

(Figure 4)

Increasing the status of vocational qualifications

There can be little doubt that vocational qualifications are perceived in the UK as having less status than academic qualifications. The CBI expressed concern in their report *Towards a Skills Revolution* and Ministers have noted:

'Vocational education has in the past been held in low esteem. We need to attack ingrained cultural attitudes that regard practical and applied studies as inferior to theoretical A-level courses. We need to promote parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications.'

(Secretary of State for Education to Institute of Directors April 1993)

Because GNVQs have been developed as a government initiative, there have been a number of Ministerial statements on vocational qualifications which can only help to raise the general awareness of vocational qualifications. The clear and explicit relationship between A levels, GCSEs and GNVQs is more significant however, as it will help establish GNVQs as vocational qualifications which are alternatives to, but of parity of esteem with, A levels and GCSEs.

THE STRUCTURE OF GNVQS

NCVQ and awarding bodies

NCVQ has a remit to co-ordinate the development of the new qualifications. The Council does not award GNVQs but must accredit (approve) both GNVQs and the awarding bodies before awarding bodies can offer GNVQs.

For a GNVQ to be accredited by NCVQ it must conform to criteria set by NCVQ and approved by Ministers. These criteria determine the purpose, structure and form of GNVQs and the type of assessment systems that must be used.

NCVQ nominates an awarding body to develop the GNVQ content for each vocational sector, e.g. Science or Engineering, to meet the national criteria. The awarding body, working with representatives of industry, professional bodies and educational interests, on behalf of all the awarding bodies, determines the scope, title, content and assessment specification of the mandatory part of the GNVQ at each level.

When the development work is complete, NCVQ accredits the GNVQ and it can then be awarded by any of the three accredited awarding bodies: BTEC; C&G; RSA (the Royal Society of Arts Examinations Board). It is expected that other awarding bodies, including GCSE and A-level awarding bodies, will be accredited by NCVQ to offer GNVQs in the future.

Unit structure

GNVQs, like NVQs, are made up of units which contain a number of elements, performance criteria and other assessment information. The elements and performance criteria of each unit describe what the student must achieve to be awarded the unit. Each unit can be separately taught or delivered and assessed, so presenting opportunities for unit certification. This means that the qualifications can be gained by students, unit by unit, using the credit accumulation potential of GNVQs.

Three types of unit make up the qualification and must be achieved in order for a student to obtain a GNVQ:

- mandatory vocational units
- optional vocational units
- core skill units

A fourth type of unit, additional units, may be achieved by the student who wishes to add to a qualification. Additional units may complement, or extend, achievement required for the qualification. They do not form part of the qualification and cannot be substituted for any other unit but are recorded on a GNVQ certificate.

The various units are combined in the qualification in different ways according to the level of the GNVQ (see fig. 5).

The Advanced GNVQ

Eight mandatory vocational units	Four optional vocational units	Three mandatory core skill units at level 3

The Intermediate GNVQ

Four mandatory vocational units	Two optional vocational units	Three mandatory core skill units at level 2

The Foundation GNVQ

Three mandatory vocational units	Three optional vocational units	Three mandatory core skill units at level 1

(Figure 5)

Mandatory vocational units are the basic vocational units of the qualification. They are designed to cover the fundamental skills, knowledge, understanding and principles common to a range of related occupations within a broad vocational sector. Each mandatory unit has a title which briefly describes the scope of each unit (see fig. 6).

The mandatory vocational units of the Advanced GNVQ in Business

Unit 1: Business in the economy
Unit 2: Business systems
Unit 3: Marketing
Unit 4: Human resources
Unit 5: Employment in the market economy
Unit 6: Financial transactions and monitoring
Unit 7: Financial resources
Unit 8: Business planning

(Figure 6)

All the mandatory vocational units must be achieved for the qualification to be awarded. They are agreed centrally for each GNVQ at each level and each awarding body must use them, unamended, when offering the GNVQ. This means, for example, that the Advanced GNVQs in Business have precisely the same mandatory vocational units regardless of the awarding body.

Optional vocational units, together with the mandatory units and core skill units make up the qualification. The number of optional vocational units a student must take is fixed. However the students can choose which optional vocational units they wish to take from a list of alternatives. Optional vocational units are designed to complement the mandatory units, extend the student's range of achievement and allow for some degree of specialised study. Some typical optional vocational unit titles appear in figure 7.

Typical optional vocational unit titles for the Advanced GNVQ in Business

Marketing
Business Law
Business Information Technology
European Business
Personnel Policies and Procedures
Financial Planning and Control
Behaviour at Work
Foreign Language

(Figure 7)

Optional units for Intermediate and Advanced GNVQs are designed by GNVQ awarding bodies and are accredited by NCVQ. Because awarding bodies are allowed to design their own optional units they may vary from awarding body to awarding body. Each awarding body offers eight optional units per Advanced title and four optional units for each Intermediate title. At the moment optional units awarded by one awarding body cannot be chosen alongside optional units awarded by another awarding body (or mandatory units certificated by another awarding body) although credit transfer may become possible. Optional units for Foundation GNVQs are designed centrally and do not vary from awarding body to awarding body.

Core skill units have been designed by NCVQ working with other agencies, including FEU, in a separate initiative. They specify the outcomes to be achieved at five levels (numbered 1 to 5) and are described in a similar unit form to mandatory and optional units. Some core skill units are mandatory and must be achieved before the qualification can be awarded. To be awarded a GNVQ a student must demonstrate achievement in the core skill units of:

- **Application of number**
- **Communication**
- **Information technology**

The student must reach achieve core skills at least at the level of the qualification for the award of a GNVQ, e.g. at least level 2 core skills for the award of an Intermediate GNVQ. Core skill achievement at levels higher than the minimum required for the award of the GNVQ can be recorded and certificated. Core skill units are designed to be integrated into the vocational activities which make up the learning programmes for students.

Other core skill units are available. These core skill units are not required for the award of GNVQs although they may be recorded and certificated. They are available in the same format, and at the same levels, as the mandatory core skill units and cover the two personal skill areas of:

- **Working with others**
- **Improving own learning and performance**

The development of units in **problem-solving skills** is continuing.

Over and above the units required for the award of a GNVQ (mandatory, optional and core skill units) students may, if they choose, take additional units. Additional units extend skills, knowledge and understanding to enhance progression within further education, or to higher education and/or to employment. These units can be selected from any level and any GNVQ area. They may cover a variety of topics including maths or a modern foreign language as well as vocational specialisms. Additional units are described in the same way as mandatory and optional units and, if successfully achieved, are certificated. Like optional units, additional units will vary from awarding body to awarding body but must be approved by NCVQ. Students do not have to take additional units to obtain a GNVQ. Some students may simply aim for the GNVQ alone or take other qualifications or part qualifications, such as GCSEs, A or A/S levels or NVQ units alongside their GNVQ as additional studies.

Equivalence with other qualifications

GNVQs are designed to be comparable in their demands to the National Curriculum, A/AS qualifications and degrees and NVQs at the same level. For this reason GNVQs are required to be related to occupational NVQs and to National Curriculum requirement (fig. 8).

NVQs and level	**GNVQs**	***Broad equivalence in academic terms***
Level 3: *competence in a broad range of varied work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts, most of which are complex and non-routine. Considerable responsibility and autonomy and control or guidance of others is often required.*	**Advanced GNVQs**	**2+ GCE A levels or equivalent in AS levels**
Level 2: *competence in a significant range of varied work activities, performed in a variety of contexts, some of which are complex or non-routine. Some individual responsibility or autonomy. Collaboration with others may often be a requirement.*	**Intermediate GNVQs**	**4 GCSEs grade C and above or National Curriculum level 7**
Level 1: *competence in the performance of a range of varied work activities, most of which may be routine and predictable.*	**Foundation**	**Other GCSEs or National Curriculum levels 5/6**

(Figure 8)

Each vocational unit of an Advanced GNVQ (which can be described as the vocational A level) is designed to correspond to the demands of one-sixth of an A level or one third of an AS level qualification. Therefore the 12 vocational units of the Advanced GNVQs are broadly comparable in their demands to two A levels. However, the inclusion of the three core skill units within the GNVQ extends the scope and demand of the qualification beyond the 12 vocational units.

Intermediate GNVQs are designed to be comparable in their demand and coverage to four GCSEs at grade C and above. In turn, this means that an Intermediate GNVQ is broadly equivalent to National Curriculum level 7.

The core skills used for GNVQs are related to National Curriculum requirements as follows on (p.7, fig. 9):

Core skill level

1 broadly equivalent to National Curriculum level 4 and below
2 broadly equivalent to National Curriculum 5 and 6
3 broadly equivalent to National Curriculum 7
4 broadly equivalent to National Curriculum 8 and 9
5 broadly equivalent to National Curriculum 10

(Figure 9)

Access and mode of study

Although GNVQs have been designed specifically for students aged between 16 and 19, they are available to all individuals aged 16 and over. In addition, the most recent information on the availability of GNVQs at Key Stage 4 (14 to 16 year olds) suggests that it will be possible for 14 to 16 year old school students to obtain some GNVQ units alongside National Curriculum subjects.

The qualifications mirror NVQs in that they can be awarded to all who meet the required standards, irrespective of the time taken to achieve the outcomes. GNVQs are not associated with programmes of learning of fixed length. It is recognised that students will require varying lengths of time to achieve a GNVQ. On the other hand, GNVQs were designed for full-time study and to have some equivalence with other qualifications so certain assumptions can be made about the time it might take to achieve a GNVQ. As a rough guide it is reasonable to assume that an Advanced GNVQ will be delivered over a two-year period and account for at least two thirds of a full-time learning programme. An Intermediate GNVQ is designed to be delivered in one year and account for a similar amount of time.

Assessment

Students must meet the full assessment requirements of all parts of the GNVQ (mandatory and optional vocational and core skill units) for the qualification to be awarded.

Each GNVQ vocational unit (mandatory, optional or additional) consists of an assessment specification describing in detail what the student must achieve in order to be awarded the unit. Each unit, which is properly called a **unit of achievement**, is broken down into a number of **elements of achievement** which specify the skills, knowledge and understanding to be assessed. Typically each unit consists of three or four elements.

Each element has:

- A number of performance criteria which clarify the activity described by the element title and which constitute the assessment criteria for the element. All performance criteria must be met before an element can be recorded as achieved.
- A statement on range which describes the major dimensions of the element. The range indicates the contexts in which evidence of achievement must be shown and the areas of knowledge and understanding required for the award of the unit.
- Evidence indicators which describe the forms in which evidence of achievement should be produced and the minimum requirements for sufficiency.

Element 1.2: Explain government influences on business

Performance criteria:

1 government approaches to economic management are explained
2 governmental interventions in national and international markets are described
3 reasons for governmental intervention are explained
4 effects of government and EC policy on business decisions and actions are explained using relevant examples taken from business

Range: **Economic management:** free market; mixed/social market; command economy

Intervention in national markets: government policy; EC policy

Intervention in international markets: protectionism; trade agreements (e.g. General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade)

Reasons for governmental intervention: to support competition; to eliminate inequality of opportunity; to subsidise essential needs; to support politically favoured business; to sustain employment

Government and EC policy: interest rates; competition; employment; regional; transport; environmental protection; common standards; taxation (company and VAT)

Evidence indicators: A brief explanation of different approaches to managing economies. A detailed explanation of UK government and EC policies which affect business organisations. Relevant examples taken from selected businesses should illustrate the explanation. Evidence should demonstrate understanding of the implications of the range dimensions in relation to the element. The unit test will confirm the candidate's coverage of range.

(Figure 10 — taken from the Advanced GNVQ unit in Business: Business in the Economy*)*

Core skill units are described in a similar format to the vocational units but because they are designed to be integrated with the other units,evidence indicators are not provided. The expectation is that evidence of core skill achievement will be produced alongside evidence of achievement in the other units.

The GNVQ assessment system is designed so that most assessment will be carried out during the course of the student's learning programme. It is expected that most, if not all, assessments for GNVQs will take place in schools and colleges although the learning experience may be improved by high quality work placements. Students can be assessed for a unit of a GNVQ at any time (subject to awarding body administrative constraints) including at the beginning of a learning programme leading to a GNVQ if it is thought that the student might already be able to meet some of the requirements for a GNVQ unit. There are no limits on the number of times a student may be assessed before achieving a unit.

Evidence of achievement will be collected by a variety of methods and gathered into a portfolio. Evidence for the portfolio may come from a variety of sources:

- evidence generated through the learning programme;
- evidence from the past, including previous achievements;
- evidence from outside the learning programme, including from the workplace, although GNVQs,unlike NVQs, do not demand work placements or simulated working environments for assessment.

The only requirements are that evidence from outside the learning programme can be authenticated and all evidence must be relevant to the GNVQ specification and criteria.

Normally a variety of assessment methods will be used ranging through observations of activities and group work, scrutiny of artefacts and products, oral and written questioning through tests, reviews and tutorials and the marking of case studies and assignments. Whichever is being used should not demand communication skills over and above those specified by the units being assessed.

Assessment of each mandatory unit against the unit criteria is complemented by an external test for each unit (except for certain units for which an external test is not appropriate).

A Code of Practice on External Assessment 1993-94, agreed by the three GNVQ awarding bodies and endorsed by NCVQ, has been published by the three GNVQ awarding bodies. This code of practice describes the purpose of external tests as providing a supplementary source of evidence which:

- *confirms that a candidate has acquired the essential knowledge and understanding associated with the unit;*
- *objectively monitors consistency of assessment between units and between centres of the acquisition of essential knowledge and principles associated with each unit and thus:*
- *enhances the consistency of the assessment process by providing a common component.'*

Code of Practice on External Assessment 1993-94

These tests, for which the pass mark is normally 70%, are usually of the short answer or multiple choice/machine markable variety, although in some cases special case studies or assignments may be allowed instead. Each test will last one hour. Awarding bodies are responsible for setting the tests and offer testing on a number of occasions throughout the year. Students may repeat tests if they are not successful on the first, or subsequent, attempts.

Since most assessment will take place in colleges, assessors will usually be teachers or lecturers. Awarding bodies, in conjunction with NCVQ, will determine the standards which must be met before individuals can be accepted as GNVQ assessors and will be responsible for ensuring that verification systems are in place. The object of the verification system is to maintain the quality of the assessment system and the qualification. Internal assessments will be checked by internal verifiers who oversee assessment within centres. Awarding bodies will appoint external verifiers who will be responsible for assuring consistency across centres and sectors and who will visit centres to provide some inter-centre quality assurance.

Grading

Students who gain all the required mandatory, optional and core skills units will gain a GNVQ. Merit or Distinction grades are awarded to students who demonstrate a level of achievement above the basic requirement required for the student to pass the GNVQ.

Merit and Distinction grades apply to the whole GNVQ. GNVQ units cannot be graded separately.

Unlike conventional grading systems, the grading of GNVQs is based upon centrally determined grading themes (i.e. they do not vary by vocational sector), concerned with the generic process skills of planning, information seeking and handling and evaluation.

The grading themes for Advanced GNVQs

Theme 1: planning the way the candidate lays down how s/he will approach and monitor the tasks/activities undertaken during a period of learning

Theme 2: information- seeking and information-handling: the way the candidate identifies and uses information sources; and checks and establishes the validity of the information obtained from these sources

Theme 3: evaluation: the way the candidate retrospectively reviews: the activities undertaken; the decisions taken in the course of that work; examination of alternative courses of action which they might have adopted; and examination of particular courses of action

Each grading theme is sub-divided into two parts. Criteria for Merit and Distinction grades are provided for each part of the theme.

An example of grading criteria

1 Drawing up plans of action

MERIT

Candidate independently draws up plans of action for a series of discrete tasks. The plans priorities the different tasks within the given time period.

DISTINCTION

Candidate independently draws up plans for complex activities. The plans prioritise the different tasks within the given time period.

Evidence of achievement in the grading themes should be collected during the learning programme into the students' portfolio and final grading decisions made when the portfolio is complete. Students are required to meet the criteria for the grade in at least one third of the evidence in their portfolio in order for a grade to be awarded.

The grading criteria for Advanced GNVQs have been designed to align the qualification with A level grades. This alignment is still being monitored but NCVQ have intended that a Distinction at GNVQ Advanced level can be aligned with grades A/B at A level, a Merit can be aligned with A-level grade C and a Pass with A-level grades D/E.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of GNVQs has been, and will continue to be, accompanied by evaluation. Colleges are still learning how to respond to some of the opportunities and challenges of the GNVQ model, devising new systems for GNVQs and monitoring a variety of approaches to implementation in an effort to find the best way of doing things. Some colleges have found that the advent of GNVQs heralds the need to review the college's entire vocational curriculum and the way sections and departments are organised. Others have re-considered the needs of different client groups as GNVQs and NVQs have been introduced and considered whether some study modes can be sustained with the new qualifications. Many colleges have used GNVQs to help in the development of new opportunities for more flexible forms of provision. All colleges welcome the inclusion of core skills in the new qualifications and some have plans to develop and assess core skill achievement in other qualifications.

Whatever the local impact on colleges, the general message gained from that first evaluation is the same: students are attracted to the new qualification, higher education and employers value the breadth of knowledge and understanding inherent in GNVQs and colleges are pleased to have a high quality national alternative to A levels and NVQs.

FEU PUBLICATIONS

FEU will be publishing a series of publications on GNVQs over the forthcoming year. The series will include bulletins on:

- GNVQs: a college response
- Staff Development for GNVQs
- The GNVQ Curriculum
- Access to and Progression from GNVQs
- Core Skills and GNVQs

FEU has available a number of other publications which are not concerned, exclusively, with GNVQs but are relevant to GNVQs:

Assessment

Assessment issues and problems in a criterion-based system: A discussion paper which identifies some of the uncertainties in criterion referenced assessment and highlights some of the problems encountered in assessment.

The Assessment of Work-Based Learning: A set of case studies describing ways of approaching the assessment of competence in the workplace.

APL (the Assessment of Prior Learning) and learner services: This document, which contains case studies of good practice, aims to help those who wish to offer APL to a variety of clients for a variety of purposes.

Core skills

Core Skills Action Pack — Principles for the development of core skills across the curriculum: A pack containing guidelines and action sheets to help colleges plan or review their progress in core skills developments.

Core Skills in Action: a bulletin describing the national core skills initiative and providing a simple guide to core skills related terminology.

Managing learning and learner support

Flexible Colleges Parts 1 and 2: A report and planning handbook designed to help colleges become more flexible.

Learner Support Services in FE: A commentary on recent developments in the provision of learner support services.

Training for the future — how can trainers meet current and future needs of industry: A set of guidelines for the development of inter disciplinary assignments containing model assignments produced by colleges participating in a TEED sponsored and FEU co-ordinated project.

Managing Learning — the role of the recording of achievement: This document describes methods for recording achievement, action planning and course reviewing evaluation.

National Vocational Qualifications

Implications of Competence-Based Curricula: A report discussing the issues of implementing competence-based qualifications.

NVQs in the Construction Craft Industry: An update on the development and implementation of NVQs in the construction craft industry.

Vocational Education and Training — briefing notes for Administration, Business and Commercial: A pack of guidance notes on learning programmes, assessment and recording systems for colleges and workplaces involved in NVQs in Administration, Business and Commercial (ABC).

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